

Attachment A: Interview/Focus Group Protocol Questions

This document contains four sets of interview/focus group protocol questions, one for each stakeholder group:

- Interview/Focus Group Protocol Questions: States, Territories, and Tribes
- Interview/Focus Group Protocol Questions: Practitioners/Service Providers
- Interview/Focus Group Protocol Questions: Parents/Caregivers
- Interview/Focus Group Protocol Questions: Young People with Lived Experience

Interview/Focus Group Protocol Questions: States, Territories, and Tribes

Form Approved
OMB No. 0990-0421
Exp. Date 2/28/27

States, Territories, and Tribes

Thank you to each of you for joining us today. My name is _____ and I am a (TITLE) at the (CONTRACTOR). We are working with the Children's Interagency Coordinating Council, or CICC for short. This group was created by Congress to improve how different government agencies work together on policies for children. It looks at different issues affecting children's well-being and reports on them. Right now, the CICC is collecting information from different groups to understand the most important problems related to child poverty and well-being.

Before we get started, I'd like to review some information about recording and confidentiality.

Purpose

As we mentioned in the email, we're here to talk about ways to reduce child poverty and improve the well-being of children and families affected by poverty. Your participation in these discussions is completely voluntary and holds the potential to inform national policies and practices for children, youth, and families experiencing poverty. We hope to use your expertise to help the CICC and federal government develop more effective strategies to support child well-being, including for children experiencing poverty.

Confidentiality

The information you share today is confidential.

With your permission we would like to record this session. By recording this session, we will be able to transcribe our conversation to ensure that what we report is accurate and in keeping with what is shared today. The recording will be transcribed. To protect your privacy, the transcript will not include any names, and all personal information will be removed. Members of the (CONTRACTOR) team will have access to the information and will share the deidentified transcripts with the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, or ASPE, for short. All information shared will remain confidential. Your name will not be used in any reports.

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0990-0421. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 90 minutes per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information.

We want this to be an open and honest conversation, so for the sake of you and the other participants, please do not share any of the comments, topics, or opinions made during today's focus group.

I want to stress that there are no right or wrong answers, and there are no risks involved with participating in this focus group. Your participation is voluntary, and you can stop at any point.

Section 1: Current Challenges and Agency Efforts

These first set of questions focus on understanding the primary issues facing children impacted by poverty in your area and learning about actions your state, territory, or Tribal agency/department has implemented to address these issues and how you communicate or promote those efforts. The goal is to gain insight into the most pressing needs, what's working, what's challenging, and how outreach, communication, and collaborative efforts are helping (or could help) children impacted by poverty achieve economic stability and improved well-being.

Question 1: Based on your background and experience, what do you see as **the most pressing issues** for children impacted by poverty in your state, territory, or Tribe?

Question 2: What are the **biggest barriers and main challenges** to addressing those issues?

Question 3: What steps has your state/territory/Tribe taken that have had **the biggest impact** in improving child well-being, particularly for children impacted by poverty?

- a. Is your agency/department engaging in any policy or legislative efforts to help direct resources to children and their families impacted by poverty?
- b. **Probe:** Is your agency/department partnering or collaborating with other state, territory, or Tribal agencies/departments/community-based organizations in your efforts?
- c. **Probe:** Is your agency/department engaging in any marketing, outreach, and/or partnership efforts that help direct resources to children and their families impacted by poverty?
 - a. **Additional Probe:** What communication tools or messaging is your agency using?
 - b. **Additional Probe:** What has worked well in using these tools and efforts?
 - c. **Additional Probe:** Are there any opportunities for improvement? If so, what are they?
- d. **Probe:** What steps, if any, has your agency/organization taken to make it easier or less difficult for children impacted by poverty to access and use resources? Such as reducing paperwork or other barriers.

Question 4: Of the collaborations you have with other state, territory, or Tribal agencies/departments, which have been **most effective** at addressing child poverty and improving child well-being? This may involve activities such as state-wide initiatives, sharing information and/or resources, strategic planning, etc.

- a. **Probe:** What has gone well in these collaborations?
- b. **Probe:** Are there any opportunities for improvement? If so, what are they?

Section 2: Federal Support and Challenges

Questions in this section focus on understanding how federal agencies have supported (or could better support) your agency's efforts to reduce child poverty and improve child well-being. We're interested in learning about the most valuable aspects of federal support as well as specific challenges you encounter when collaborating with federal agencies.

Question 5: In relation to your work, what are your **biggest sources of frustration** with federal agencies' programs and actions?

- a. **Probe:** In what ways do federal agencies make it challenging to foster collaboration across agencies and programs at the state/territorial/Tribal level?
- b. **Probe:** Are there ways that federal agencies could improve the way they communicate, provide guidance, and share resources with your agency/department?

Question 6: Other than funding, what are the most valuable ways that federal agencies have assisted your state's/ territory's/Tribe's efforts to reduce child poverty and improve child well-being?

- a. **Probe:** Are there specific examples of resources, collaborations, guidance, flexibility, data, information, etc. that were particularly valuable?
- b. **Probe:** What type of research, data, or technical assistance from the federal government would be most helpful as you work to reduce child poverty and improve child and family well-being?
- c. **Probe:** Are there ways that federal agencies could be better aligned to support your efforts?

Section 3: Future Recommendations

In this final section, we want to hear your thoughts on how the CICC should address child poverty and improve child well-being in the future. We're particularly interested in getting your insight into long-term priorities.

Question 7: What would you recommend that the new federal Children's Interagency Coordinating Council prioritize over the next decade to help your state, territory, or Tribe better address child poverty and well-being? Recommendations may involve data sharing/integration, developing resources to raise awareness of available services and benefits, guidance for policy/program implementation, waivers, etc. We recommend you reference the background sheet on Identifying Federal CICC levers, entitled *Addressing Child Poverty and Well-Being: What Can Federal Agencies Do?* (Attachment E), that we shared in advance for other ideas.

Interview/Focus Group Protocol Questions: Practitioners/Service Providers

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Practitioners/Service Providers

Thank you to each of you for joining us today. My name is _____ and I am a (TITLE) at the (CONTRACTOR). We are working with the Children's Interagency Coordinating Council. This group was created by Congress to improve how different government agencies work together on policies for children. It looks at different issues affecting children's well-being and reports on them. Right now, the CICC is collecting information from different groups to understand the most important problems related to child poverty and well-being.

Before we get started, I'd like to review some information about recording and confidentiality.

Purpose

As we mentioned in the email, we're here to talk about ways to reduce child poverty and improve the well-being of children and families affected by poverty. Your participation in these discussions is completely voluntary and holds the potential to inform national policies and practices for children, youth, and families experiencing poverty. We hope to use your expertise to help the CICC and federal government develop more effective strategies to support child well-being, including for children experiencing poverty.

Confidentiality

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I want to stress that there are no right or wrong answers, and there are no risks involved with participating in this focus group. Your participation is voluntary, and you can stop at any point.

Section 1: Current Challenges and Agency Efforts

These first set of questions focus on understanding the primary issues facing children impacted by poverty in your community and learning about actions your agency/organization has implemented to address these issues. The goal is to gain insight into the most pressing needs, what's working, what's challenging, and how outreach, communication, and collaborative efforts are helping (or could help) children impacted by poverty achieve economic stability and improved wellbeing.

Question 1: From your experience as a practitioner and/or service provider, what do you see **as the most pressing issues** for children impacted by poverty in your community?

Question 2: What are the **biggest barriers and main challenges** to addressing these issues as a practitioner and/or service provider?

Question 3: What steps has your agency/organization taken that have had **the biggest impact** in helping improve well-being for children, especially those impacted by poverty?

- a. **Probe:** How are you directing available resources to children impacted by poverty?
- b. **Probe:** Is your agency/organization partnering or collaborating with other agencies/ community-based organizations in your efforts?
- c. **Probe:** Is your agency/organization engaging in any marketing, outreach, and/or partnership efforts that help direct resources to children impacted by poverty?
 - a. **Additional Probe:** What communication tools do you use?
 - b. **Additional Probe:** What has gone well with using these tools and engaging in these efforts?
 - c. **Additional Probe:** Are there any opportunities for improvement? If so, what are they?
- d. **Probe:** What steps, if any, has your agency/organization taken to make it easier or less difficult for children impacted by poverty to access and use resources? Such as reducing paperwork or other barriers.

Question 4: Of the collaborations you have with other agencies/departments/community-based organizations, which have been **most effective** at addressing child poverty and improving child well-being? This may involve activities such as state-wide initiatives, sharing information and/or resources, strategic planning, etc.

- a. **Probe:** These may be local, state, territory, Tribal, or federal agencies and organizations.
- b. **Probe:** What has gone well in these collaborations?
- c. **Probe:** Are there any opportunities for improvement? If so, what are they?

Section 2: Federal, State, Territory, and Tribal Support and Challenges

Questions in this section focus on understanding how government agencies have supported (or could better support) your agency's efforts to reduce child poverty and improve child well-being. We're interested in learning about the most valuable aspects of federal, state, territory, and Tribal support as well as specific challenges you encounter when collaborating with these agencies.

State, Territory, and Tribal Governments

The next two questions specifically ask about challenges encountered with and supports provided by **state, territory, and Tribal agencies**. Later, I will ask questions regarding the federal government.

Question 5: In relation to your work, what are your biggest sources of frustration with **state, territory, and Tribal agencies'** programs and actions in addressing child poverty and well-being?

- a. **Probe:** In what ways do **state, territory, and Tribal agencies** make it challenging to provide resources and services to children impacted by poverty in your community?
- b. **Probe:** Are there ways that **with state, territory, and Tribal agencies** could improve the way they communicate, provide guidance, and share resources with your agency/department?

Question 6: Other than funding, what are the most valuable ways that **state, territory, and Tribal governments** have assisted your agency's/organization's efforts to reduce child poverty and improve child well-being?

- a. **Probe:** Are there specific examples of resources, collaborations, guidance, processes, data, information, etc. that were particularly valuable?
- b. **Probe:** What type of research, data, or technical assistance from **state, territory, and Tribal governments** would be most helpful as you work to reduce child poverty and improve child and family well-being?
- c. **Probe:** Are there ways that **state, territory, and Tribal governments** could be better aligned to support your work?

Federal Government Agencies

Now, the next three questions will ask about challenges encountered with and supports provided by the **federal government - specifically by federal executive branch agencies, and not Congress**.

Question 7: In relation to your work, what are your biggest sources of frustration with **federal agencies'** programs and actions in addressing child poverty and well-being?

- a. **Probe:** In what ways do **federal agencies** make it challenging to provide resources and services to children impacted by poverty in your community?
- b. **Probe:** Are there ways that **federal agencies** could improve the way they communicate, provide guidance, and share resources with your agency/department?

Question 8: Other than funding, what are the most valuable ways that **federal agencies** have assisted your agency's/organization's efforts to reduce child poverty and improve child well-being?

- a. **Probe:** Are there specific examples of resources, collaborations, guidance, flexibility, data, information, etc. that were particularly valuable?
- b. **Probe:** What type of research, data, or technical assistance from **the federal government** would be most helpful as you work to reduce child poverty and improve child and family well-being?
- c. **Probe:** Are there ways that **federal agencies** could be better aligned to support your work?

Question 9: How could **federal agencies** improve coordination and transparency between state, territory, and Tribal governments and your agency/organization?

- a. **Probe:** Are there specific examples of resources, collaborations, research, technical assistance, or other supports **federal agencies** could provide that would be most helpful to your agency's/organization's work in reducing child poverty and improving child and family well-being?
- b. **Probe:** In what ways do **federal agencies** make it challenging to foster collaboration across agencies and programs at the state/territorial/Tribal level?

Section 3: Future Recommendations

In this final section, we will discuss effective partnerships or collaborations you've engaged in with other organizations and explore your recommendations for future federal priorities to improve support for children in poverty.

Question 10: What would you recommend that the new federal Children's Interagency Coordinating Council prioritize over the next decade to help your agency/organization better address child poverty and well-being? Recommendations may involve data sharing/integration, developing resources to raise awareness of available services and benefits, waivers, guidance for policy/program implementation, etc. We recommend you reference the background sheet on Identifying Federal CICC levers, entitled *Addressing Child Poverty and Well-Being: What Can Federal Agencies Do? (Attachment E)*, that we shared in advance for other ideas.

Interview/Focus Group Protocol Questions: Parents/Caregivers

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Parents/Caregivers

Thank you to each of you for joining us today. My name is _____ and I am a (TITLE) at (CONTRACTOR). We are working with the Children's Interagency Coordinating Council, or CICC for short. This group was created by Congress to improve how different government agencies work together on policies for children. It looks at different issues affecting children's well-being and reports on them. Right now, the CICC is collecting information from different groups to understand the most important problems related to child poverty and well-being.

Before we get started, I'd like to review some information about recording and confidentiality.

Purpose

As we mentioned in the email, we're here to talk about ways to reduce child poverty and improve the well-being of children and families affected by poverty. Your participation in these discussions is completely voluntary and holds the potential to inform national policies and practices for children, youth, and families experiencing poverty. We hope to use your expertise to help the CICC and federal government develop more effective strategies to support child well-being, including for children experiencing poverty.

Confidentiality

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Section 1: Understanding Key Challenges for Children and their Families

This first question aims to identify the biggest issues parents and caregivers see affecting their child(ren) and their families. It explores the specific challenges that children and their families face in achieving economic stability and improving well-being, and their overall needs.

Question 1: Based on your experience as a parent or caregiver, what do you see as the most pressing issues impacting your child(ren)?

- a. **Probe:** For example, are there issues related to family finances, your child(ren)'s community, social relationships, health, education, parenting, child care, sense of agency, and safety that may impact your child(ren)'s overall well-being now or later in life?
- b. **Probe:** Has your child told you of any issues that they believe are impacting their well-being?
 - a. **EXAMPLES RELATED TO a:** ADD EXAMPLES RELATED TO ISSUES IN PROBE A

Section 2: Accessing and Using Resources

Questions in this section asks about your experience accessing and using available resources to support the needs of your child(ren), including what has worked well and what barriers exist. These questions ask about both positive experiences and challenges that have prevented you from using services.

Question 2: Have you or people you know, such as family members, friends, or neighbors, tried to access government resources or services to help with these issues? Examples of government resources or services are food stamps (or SNAP), WIC, TANF, Head Start, child care subsidies, Medicaid, housing vouchers (Section 8 or Housing Choice Voucher Program), Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC; tax refund), and more.

If YES:

1. Is there anything that has made it easier to access and use these resources, benefits, or services?
 - a. **Probe:** How do you hear about these resources, benefits, or services (e.g., social media, flyers, medical providers, case managers, social workers, teachers, friends, families, etc.)?
 - b. **Probe:** What makes it easier to apply for, get, and use these resources, benefits, or services?
2. What has made it harder to access and use those resources, benefits, or services?
 - a. **Probe:** For example, lack of information, confusing application process, lack of access to technology (e.g., Wi-fi, laptop, etc.), stigma (negative view of welfare),

lack of trust in government, lack of transportation, losing benefits due to an increase in income, etc.

3. If you previously accessed these resources, benefits, or services but no longer do, why did the services stop or discontinue?

If NO:

1. Is there anything that stopped you from trying to access government resources, benefits, or services to help with these issues?
 - a. **Probe:** For example, lack of awareness, confusing application process, lack of access to technology (e.g., Wi-fi, laptop, etc.), stigma (negative view of welfare), lack of trust in government, lack of transportation, benefit cliffs, didn't think I needed it, didn't know I was eligible, etc.
 - b. **Probe:** When considering accessing government resources, benefits, or services did you encounter any challenges or barriers?
2. Is there anything that could help make it easier for you and others to know about these resources, benefits, and services?
 - a. **Probe:** Do you have any suggestions of what can help people better understand and know of programs and services in their community?
 - b. **Probe:** Where should information about resources, benefits, or services be advertised to make it easier for parents or caregivers to know about the resources?
 - c. **Probe:** Where do you get your information about resources, benefits, or services?

Question 3: Thinking about government resources and services that you have been able to access, in what ways are they lacking?

- a. **Probe:** For example, not enough (quantity), lack of quality, not flexible (e.g., hours of service, location/transportation, limited options), difficult to use, lack of information, wait lists etc.

Question 4: Are there resources/benefits/services that you needed for your child(ren) but could not find or access? If so, what was the need and what was the barrier?

Section 3: Improving Resource and Service Delivery

This last question seeks ideas from you about how government agencies can better provide resources. It explores suggestions for improving communication, awareness, and support.

Question 5: Besides providing more money, what could the government do to better create and deliver resources and services?

- a. **Probe:** For example, better communication, advertising, sharing information, easier referral process, awareness, application assistance, waivers, staff training, increase in staff, automatic re-enrollment in qualifying programs, etc.

Interview/Focus Group Protocol Questions: Young People with Lived Experience

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Young People with Lived Experience

Thank you all for being here today! My name is _____, and I work as a (TITLE) at (CONTRACTOR). We're working with a group called the Children's Interagency Coordinating Council, or CICC for short. This group was created by the government to help make sure that different groups that work with kids are doing their best to help. They focus on problems that affect kids' well-being, and right now, they are collecting information to understand the main challenges young people are facing in achieving economic stability and improving their well-being.

Before we begin, I want to talk about a couple of things to make sure everyone feels comfortable.

Purpose

As we mentioned in the email, we're here today to talk about the biggest problems that you face in your daily life to help understand the main challenges young people are facing in achieving economic stability and improving their well-being. What you share in this conversation can help the people who make decisions about kids' lives know what to do to make things better. Your thoughts and ideas are really important in helping the government figure out the best ways to help kids in need.

Confidentiality

What you share with us today is private.

With your permission, we'd like to record what we talk about. This helps us make sure we get everything right when we write down what was said. If we record, we will turn the recording into writing (called a transcript). Don't worry, we will not use any names in the writing, and we will make sure no one can figure out who said what. Only the people from the (CONTRACTOR) team will look at it, and we will share it in a way that keeps everything private. Your name won't be in any reports.

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We want you to feel safe sharing your ideas, so we ask that you not talk about what happens in this meeting with others. This is so everyone can share openly.

Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. Everything you say is helpful, and there's no risk in joining. You can choose to stop anytime if you don't want to keep going.

Section 1: Recognizing Everyday Challenges for Young People

This first question focuses on the biggest problems that you face in your daily life to help understand the main challenges young people are facing in achieving economic stability and improving their well-being.

Question 1: What are the biggest problems you face when thinking about your life right now or your future job, education, or career?

- a. **Probe:** For example, lack of food, lack of quality education, barriers to attending college, poor or unstable housing, crime, access to healthcare (including vision, dental, therapy, medications), mental health, career opportunities, lack of recreational activities, lack of community supports (such as caring adults, mentors, friends/peers, etc.), etc.
- b. **Probe:** What other challenges do you face that impact your ability to overcome barriers?

Section 2: Support Systems and What Helps Most

These next questions will ask about the supports and services that have been most helpful to you, whether it's from people or programs. We will also ask about the kinds of support that would be most helpful in addressing current problems.

Question 2: What kinds of things or people help you deal with these problems?

- a. **Probe:** Who has helped (e.g., family, friends, teachers, counselors, coaches, therapists, mentors, social workers, foster parent, partner/spouse)?
- b. **Probe:** What things or activities have helped and how (e.g., school, recreational/community-based activities, religious organizations, therapy, wellness activities, mindfulness, therapy, social media, visiting the museum, cooking, helping others, work, etc.)?
- c. **Probe:** What resources do you have that help you overcome these problems? They could be resources like transportation, social media, technology, skills, and knowledge.

Question 3: What types of support would help the most with the biggest problems you face?

- a. **Probe:** For example, more social interaction (with friends, family, peers, supervisors, etc.), mentors, activities, academic opportunities, safer environments, changes in the community, educational workshops, etc.

Section 3: Access to Programs and Recommendations

This final section asks about your experiences with accessing support, including experiences you or people you know may have had with programs. It is also a time to discuss any ideas on how the government can help improve communication and the availability of support in ways that would make it easier or more accessible for you.

Question 4: Have you or people you know, such as family members, friends, peers, or neighbors, ever tried to access government resources, benefits, or services to help with the problems you have already mentioned? Examples of government resources or services are food stamps (or SNAP), WIC, TANF, Head Start, child care subsidies, Medicaid, Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC; or tax refund), housing vouchers (or Section 8) etc.

a. If YES:

1. Was there anything helpful about using these government resources, benefits, or services?
2. Was there anything NOT helpful about using these government resources, benefits, or services?

b. If NO:

1. Is there anything that stopped you from getting these government resources, benefits, or services?
 - a. **Probe:** For example, lack of awareness, confusing application process, lack of access to technology (e.g., Wi-fi, laptop, etc.), stigma (negative view of welfare), lack of trust in government, lack of transportation, benefit cliffs, didn't think I needed it, didn't know I was eligible, etc.
 - b. **Probe:** When considering accessing government resources, benefits, or services did you encounter any challenges or barriers?
2. Is there anything that could help make it easier for you and others to know about these resources, benefits, and services?
 - a. **Probe:** Do you have any suggestions of what can help people better understand and know of programs and services in their community?
 - b. **Probe:** Where should information about resources, benefits, or services be advertised to make it easier for parents or caregivers to know about the resources?
 - c. **Probe:** Where do you get your information about resources, benefits, or services?

Question 5: Where and how do you get information about government resources, benefits, or services?

- a. **Probe:** For example, at school, online, in the community (community-based), through the government, at home, news, word of mouth, social media, promoted by influencers or peer educators, service providers/staff, etc.

Question 6: What format do you prefer to receive information about government resources, benefits, or services?

- a. **Probe:** For example, paper brochure, social media post (e.g., TikTok video, Instagram), email, text, phone call, home visit from service provider/staff, community meeting, news, word of mouth, etc.

Question 7: Other than more money, what could the government do to better provide help?

- a. **Probe:** For example, better communication, advertising, sharing information, spreading awareness, application assistance, connecting to community groups, pairing with advocates,

providing free access to legal aid, training staff (to be more trauma informed, culturally aware, and aware of youth and young people's experiences, etc).